



Flowering of Nicodemus

The official newsletter of Nicodemus National Historic Site

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Superintendent's Note

There sure seems to have been a lot of work for our staff of four these past few months! We are missing Park Ranger Reggie Murray who transferred to William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati in January. But, Park Ranger Phyllis Howard has ably taken over all his duties until we are able to hire someone to help. Because of tighter budgets, we cannot fill this vacancy with another "Park Ranger." However, we will be hiring a permanent "Park Guide" (a lower-graded position). We will send a job announcement about this opening to everyone on our mailing list and hope that residents or descendants of Nicodemus will apply for the position.

These last three months have been productive. Progress is proceeding on stabilizing the First Baptist Church [see the separate article]. Also, we have received grants to conduct two small projects this year

In March, the African American Experience Fund/National Park Foundation funded a project to record memories of several of the older people here in or around Nicodemus ("oral histories"). You may remember that Dr. Jennifer Michael recorded similar interviews in 1999 and Mr. Luis Torres recorded some interviews in 2001. Mr. Torres conducted these new interviews for the National Historic Site the week of May 8th. In addition to talking with Mrs. Ora Switzer again, we wanted to talk with people who were not interviewed during the previous projects for new perspectives on the history of Nicodemus. Unfortunately, we received the grant late and were unable to reach

several of the people we initially wanted to interview. Still, there were six people around town that graciously agreed to share their stories, including Mrs. Ora Switzer, Mrs. Florence Howard, Mrs. Bertha Carter, Mr. Fred Switzer, Mr. Lee Switzer, and Mr. Rudolph Bates.

Mr. Torres asked questions like, "Did you grow up in Nicodemus the town or did you live outside of Nicodemus? How long did you live there? What are some of your strongest memories of growing up or living here? What would you like to tell visitors to Nicodemus National Historic Site about your family? Where did your family come from and how did they get to Nicodemus? Who in your family did you most respect and why? How did you make a living? How did your parents make a living? Did you have to work hard as a child? What kind of chores or work did you help with? Do you remember stories about older people, some of the first people that came to Nicodemus? Did they seem to be glad they came to Kansas and satisfied to be here?"

I've included this list of questions because recording your family stories can also be a fun project! You can create your own recording of your parent's or grandparents' memories. Or, even record your own memories! A tape-recording will preserve these stories and allow your children and grandchildren to hear all about growing up in or visiting Nicodemus – what a precious gift to pass along! There are several websites that give you hints on how to record these memories, including:

1) <http://www.memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/oralhist/ohhome.html>

2) http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html.

Also in March, we received a grant to conduct a small archeology investigation project, in partnership with archeologist Dr. Margaret Wood from Washburn University (Topeka). The project goal is to locate and identify some of the old dugout or sod house sites from the early settlement years of Nicodemus (approximately 1877-1880). We obtained permission from several landowners to conduct this work [see separate article]. Exciting things are underway at Nicodemus NHS! Let us know if you have ideas on what we should be trying.

Sherda K. Williams, Superintendent

Fred Switzer Participates in Kansas Storytelling Festival

For the third year in a row, Mr. Fred Switzer participated in the 13th annual Kansas Storytelling Festival in Downs, Kansas. People really enjoy hearing about Mr. Switzer's rich career and about his life, friends, and family.



Progress on the First Baptist Church

Stabilization of the Historic First Baptist Church

Work on the 1907 First Baptist Church is moving along, although there have been some delays due to high winds (no surprise in western Kansas) and at least a week of rainy days (surprise!). The contractor now has the roof completely shingled, has the eaves all boxed in, and has rebuilt the frame of the bell tower. When the tower was first inspected a couple of years ago, we found so much rot and termite damage that we had to ask the contractor, Terry Price (Price Construction of Tulsa, Oklahoma), to completely rebuild the tower. When Terry and Val Williams start to shingle the tower, they will replicate the historic pattern which included shingles with round and pointed ends. It should look very nice. Terry and Val still need to complete the external brace for the east wall. The National Park Service is funding this stabilization project through a cooperative agreement with the Historic Nicodemus First Baptist Church Foundation. The Church's Foundation will be pursuing grants for completely rehabilitating the structure to return it to usable condition.

The First Baptist Church is one of the five properties designated by Congress as part of Nicodemus National Historic Site.



The bell tower before being rebuilt, in November 2005.



Termite damage in some of the structural timbers that had to be replaced.



Val Williams finishing the shingling on the main roof.



Terry Price, with the frame for the bell tower structure being rebuilt.



Dennis Moore helps Val Williams lay new shingles on the west side of the main roof.



May 16, 2006 -- All the roofing is complete, the eaves are boxed in, some of the vented window covers have been installed (to keep birds out, but let some air circulate), and shingling is starting on the bell tower. A detail photograph of the shingle pattern is included on the last page of this newsletter.

(All Photos: NPS)

News From Our Park Partners

Nicodemus Flour Co-op

The Co-op is still selling our famous pancake mix at records rates! We are also still trying to find a permanent home so we can start milling flour again. We have a couple of good possibilities. So continue to watch this spot for further information. Our next big event will be the Annual FREE Pancake Breakfast during Homecoming on July 29th. Meanwhile, you can get our pancake mix by contacting either Gil Alexander or Sharyn Kountz, leaving a message at 888-271-2411... and, of course, it is available at the NPS Visitor Center.

Nicodemus Homecoming Committee

This year's event is shaping up to be one of the best ever! We are extending the activities to include Thursday through Sunday. On Thursday, the Kansas Black Farmers Association will be sponsoring an event for the area farmers and interested parties with USDA representatives from the national level. This should be a very informative and interesting seminar for those with farming interest. Also on Thursday, we will be featuring those families who are having the reunions that weekend. On Friday, the vendors will be setting up with the evening being started off by "Jazz in the Park" program featuring musicians from Kansas, New York, and Idaho who will be performing jazz standards from the American Songbook. They will provide music during the early hours of the evening before the dance on the platform. Saturday will be packed full of events including the free Pancake Breakfast, parade, major dignitaries on the



program, fashion show, golf tournament, softball game, basketball tourney, and the gospel extravaganza (in the park) ... to mention only a few. We expect to have a multitude of vendors this year ready to provide your every need and desire! So mark your calendars and tell your boss you are going to historic Nicodemus, Kansas to be part of the 10th Anniversary Celebration of our inclusion in the National Park System on July 27th – 30th. See you there!! For more information or to receive a vendor form, please call Alvena Alexander at 785-839-4494.

Nicodemus Township

The Nicodemus Township Board and the Nicodemus Pride Committee are continuing to work with Graham County on a Rehabilitation Grant. There has been a request submitted to the State to continue with the rehabilitation work while dropping their requirements for demolition of several structures. While granting this request would be unlikely, it is still a possibility.

The Board has hired Roger Clark as the maintenance person. You will see Roger mowing around town and doing repairs as needed. The Board is still working on some improvements for the playground and hopes to complete some noticeable progress in the near future. They will be installing a temporary light for the horseshoe pit soon to see if it will get some evening use.

The Board recently worked with the Nicodemus Villa to get a larger dumpster installed to alleviate the overflow situations that were occurring.

Sharyn Kountz, Trustee
Esther Clark, Treasurer
Alvena Alexander, Clerk

Director Visits Nicodemus National Historic Site During Black History Month

Director Fran Mainella visited Nicodemus National Historic Site on February 25th for Black History Month. Ms. Mainella is the highest ranking official in the National Park Service. She spoke to the staff from Nicodemus and Fort Larned National Historic Sites and recognized two employees with time-in-service awards.

Director Mainella presented Nicodemus NHS Park Ranger Phyllis Howard with her 10-year service pin. A native of Alabama, Ranger Howard lived and worked in Colorado for more than twenty years before moving to Kansas in the year of 2002. She started her career with the Park Service as a volunteer doing living history interpretation at Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site in La Junta, Colorado.

The Director also presented Felix Revello with his 30-year pin and plaque. Ranger Felix Revello has served in a wide variety of national parks throughout our Nation. His latest assignment is at Fort Larned NHS, where he has served as Chief Ranger since August 1993. Revello has been responsible directing ranger activities encompassing interpretation, law enforcement, fee collection, park safety officer and natural and cultural management. Revello was also heavily involved with initiating operations and planning for Nicodemus National Historic Site, which is administratively supported by Fort Larned NHS. In particular, he was an active participant on the General Management Plan team. He also served as Acting Superintendent for Nicodemus NHS for several months. Previous assignments included Cape Lookout National Seashore, North Carolina (1986 to 1993), Buck Island National Monument & Christiansted National Historic Site, U.S. Virgin Islands (1982 to 1986), Colorado National Monument, Colorado (1980 to 1982), Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, Montana (1979 to 1980), Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, Florida (1977 to 1979), and Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota (1972 to 1975).

Director Fran Mainella was escorted by Midwest Regional Director Ernie Quintana, Deputy Regional Director David Given Director, and LaTonya Miller Public Affairs Specialist—all from Omaha, Nebraska. While on site, she was given a tour of the site by park staff. Later that morning, Director Mainella spoke to a crowd of over sixty local residents, descendants, Graham County Commissioners, and Rachel Roach from Congressman Jerry Moran's office.

Director Mainella encouraged everyone to keep the history of Nicodemus alive. During her opening remarks, the Director commented on how Nicodemus is significant—not only to African American History but, just as importantly, to American History. She emphasized the idea that even though the site

itself may be small in size, that Nicodemus history is a tremendous and significant asset to our American heritage and to the National Park Service. She strongly encouraged those in attendance to partner with the National Park Service and the staff at Nicodemus NHS to preserve the site resources and to educate the public about the history of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus NHS consists of five historical buildings located within a living community. Nicodemus is the only all Black town west of the Mississippi River founded at the end of the Reconstruction era (1877) on the western plains.



*From left to right: Superintendent Sherda Williams, Director Fran Mainella, Park Ranger **Phyllis Howard**, and Midwest Regional Director Ernie Quintana.*



*From left to right: Fort Larned NHS Superintendent Kevin McMurry, Director Fran Mainella, Fort Larned NHS Chief of Interpretation, Education & Visitor Services **Felix Revello**, Mrs. Linda Revello, and Midwest Regional Director Ernie Quintana. (All Photos above by NPS)*



***Director Fran Mainella** extended her visit to Nicodemus so she could meet **Mrs. Ora Switzer** during her 103rd birthday celebration, hosted by the Switzer family on February 25th at the Nicodemus Villa.*

(Photo: Courtesy of the Hill City Times)

More Honor and Recognition for African American History

In February, Congress and the President added two new units to the National Park System – the Carter G. Woodson National Historic Site in Washington, DC and the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City. This brings the total National Parks to 390, and includes 20 parks that focus primarily on African American history. Congress designated Nicodemus National Historic Site ten years ago on November 12, 1996.

Also this spring, the Secretary of the Interior designated the *Sixteenth Street Baptist Church* in Birmingham, Alabama as a National Historic Landmark. The Church was the site of a Ku Klux Klan attack on September 15, 1963 that killed four African American girls. The bombing shocked the nation and galvanized the civil rights movement. Nearly 8,000 Black and White citizens of Birmingham attended the funeral. The public outcry in the following weeks was a catalyst to the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There are fewer than 2,500 historic places that are honored as National Historic Landmarks ...including *Nicodemus National Historic Landmark District* (the entire town site of 160 acres), which was designated by the Secretary of the Interior in 1976 as part of our Nation's Bicentennial Celebration.

Carter G. Woodson National Historic Site Becomes the 389th National Park

Dr. Woodson (1875-1950) was a Harvard-trained historian and DC Public Schools teacher. He founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. In 1922, he moved into a row house at 1538 9th Street, NW in Washington, D.C. He lived and worked there for 38 years until his death. He is known as the “father of African

American history.” Dr. Woodson successfully established the study of Black history as an academic discipline. He fought to counter the commonly held belief that African Americans had made little or no contribution to the development of the American nation. In 1926, he started Negro History Week. This event is now known as Black History Month.

His home is part of the historic district known as the Shaw neighborhood. This historic district is called the “Heart of Black Washington” as several of the buildings hold historical and cultural significance. Dr. Woodson's home was first designated a National Historic Landmark on May 11, 1976 for its national significance in African American cultural heritage. The row house is currently owned by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.



NPS Photo

The Carter G. Woodson Home is located at 1538 Ninth Street, NW in Washington, D.C.

The African Burial Ground National Monument Becomes the 390th National Park

President Bush proclaimed the African Burial Ground Memorial a National Monument in New York due to its significance to America history. The National Monument honors the culture and memory of 10,000 to 20,000 Africans and African Americans who are buried in this country's oldest known urban African cemetery. The 15,000 square foot burial ground is located in lower Manhattan in New York and is surrounded by concrete

and steel as well as the hustle and bustle of the large urban city.

Historians can document the existence of the African cemetery as early as 1712 on the edge of the growing city of Manhattan. The African cemetery came into existence after free and enslaved colonial Africans and African American were denied a final resting place by many New York churches. By 1795, the demands of the developing city and growing population of Manhattan threaten to over take the cemetery. Years later by 1812, few headstones or other markings were left, and many of the graves were covered over with up to 25 feet of pack dirt. Down through the years the only indication of the existence of the cemetery was markings on a few historic maps. No graves were ever moved.

Historians have known about the existence of the burial ground for decades. Interest in the burial ground was renewed in 1991 when the cemetery became the focal point of an archaeological investigation. A federal office building was planned to be constructed on the site. The investigation would conclude that the burial ground held national historical significance.



The design for the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City.

NPS Photo

Distance Learning Programs at Nicodemus NHS

We have had two successful programs using our Distance Learning station. For Black History Month, Amy Garrett Park Ranger/Education Coordinator at Homestead National Monument of America (in Beatrice, Nebraska) requested a program on Nicodemus. On February 19, using our distance learning station (an Internet video conferencing system), Ranger Phyllis Howard gave two 30-minute talks on the history of Nicodemus and an overview of future programs. Ranger Howard addressed an audience of about 27 people at Homestead National Monument in Nebraska. After the overview on Nicodemus history, the audience were able to talk directly to Ranger Howard and ask questions. Some of the listeners had never heard of Nicodemus National Historic Site and were pleased to learn about the history of Nicodemus. One of the ladies that attended the program in Nebraska visited Nicodemus last month. She wanted to see the site and to learn more so that she could take that information with her to share with her grandson's school up near the Nebraska – Kansas border.

Then on April 23rd at the start of National Park Week, the distance learning stations were used by eight National Parks. All eight parks were able to connect to each other at the same time. From the hours of 10:00am to 2:00pm, each Park offered audiences the opportunity to visit and learn about another Park without leaving the host Park. Ranger Howard was able to connect with Park Ranger Julie Johndreau from Badlands National Park in South Dakota for 30 minutes. The folks at Badlands were delighted to hear about Nicodemus.

Out of the eight parks participating in this event, Badlands National Park and George Washington Carver National Monument in Missouri had the most participants. Visitors were thrilled to learn about a relatively new park, Minuteman Missile National Historic Site located in South Dakota. This national park, located near Badlands National Park along Interstate 90 consists of Delta-1 (a command center for a missile cluster) and Delta-9 (one of the missile silos). We were pleased to partner with these other national parks and get the word out to more people about Nicodemus! If you are interested in using the distance learning technology for a classroom presentation by a Park Ranger, check out the following website: http://www.sndlc.org/enrich_partners.htm.

Right: Visitors at Homestead NMA watching a presentation by Ranger Julie Johndreau at Badlands National Park.



Audience at Homestead NMA watching Nicodemus NHS Ranger Phyllis Howard. (Photo: NPS, Ranger Amy Garrett, February 19th.)



(Photo: NPS, A. Garrett, Homestead NMA)

Results of NPS Visitor Survey Soon to be Available

Survey booklets were handed out to visitors to Nicodemus National Historic Site between July 23-September 13, 2005. Visitors were asked to take the booklet with them, fill it out after their visit, and then mail the completed surveys to Ms. Margaret Littlejohn (a National Park Service researcher, stationed at the University of Idaho). A total of 208 questionnaires were sent to Margaret. People who answered the survey questions remain anonymous. After the statistical results of the survey were compiled, Margaret presented the results at a public meeting in Nicodemus on May 13, 2006. Results of this study should be posted

on the University of Idaho website (<http://www.psu.uidaho.edu/vsp.reports.htm>) by the first of June. Copies will be provided to surrounding counties.



NPS Researcher Margaret Littlejohn (in red coat) answers questions from people who attended the May 13th presentation.

(Photo: NPS)

Archeological Field School Begins Near Nicodemus

Dr. Margaret Wood and eight students from Washburn University began test pits to establish if a depression on land north of Nicodemus is actually an early dugout. The possible dugout is located on the Tom Johnson place (Emma Williams, mother of Henry Williams, the first baby born in Nicodemus, was a Johnson daughter). To archeologists, this project is extremely important because there have been very few excavations of early African American family dugouts. These test excavations will hopefully confirm that this was a domestically used dugout. Small bits of ceramic, glass, bone, and metal can tell archeologists a lot about how people lived when they first came here. Small artifacts, like buttons and ceramic fragments would help confirm that it was used as a house. No buried features, like stone walls, will be removed. This is not a complete excavation of the site, but only test pits. Dr. Wood hopes to confirm the presence of a packed floor, perhaps a hearth, and a sod or stone front wall. The project started on May 15th. Dr. Wood said that people are welcome to volunteer for a day or for a few hours to get an idea of what archeology is all about...or you can simply come by to visit the site and see what the students are doing. The archeology students will be here until June 2nd. If you have any questions, please call Superintendent Williams at 785-839-4321.



Dr. Wood explains how to confirm the soil type.



Explaining basic procedures to the students.



Angela Bates broke ground for the first test pit.



Work begins on the first test pits (about 2 1/2 ft. square).



Excavation of each test pit requires slow and painstaking scaping so no artifacts are missed.



All removed soil is rubbed through a sifter screen to make sure no tiny bits of glass, etc. are missed.



The site is just uphill from a beautiful spring area, with (now) mature Cottonwoods and a well pump. Main. Worker Robert Brogden helped install an electric fence to keep cattle out of the site.



Laying out the test trench across the actual dugout depression.





National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior

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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

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785-839-4321 Office

Federal Job Announcements
(USAJOBS)
www.usajobs.opm.gov

*The **Flowering of Nicodemus** is a quarterly publication of Nicodemus National Historic Site.*



Mr. Terry Price begins the installation of the alternating pattern of fancy shingles on the bell tower. Val Williams is working on the opposite side of the tower.